



**Sergeants Major Academy
Class Remarks
(2520 words/~16 minutes)
Ft. Bliss, Texas
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As Delivered**

Good morning. MSG Boyd, thank you for that introduction and thank you for your service to this great institution – our United States Army. It is an honor for me to be here at this remarkable campus and among so many of our Nation's finest.

I would like to recognize this year's Sergeant Major Course Class and in particular, the foreign senior enlisted leaders who are representing their countries here this morning. For the 46 of you from 32 countries – three of you here for the first time – you are the latest in a tradition of international students who have studied here and shared your rich experiences with American NCOs. Over the years, 480 Soldiers from 63 countries have graduated from this course. I know your presence here means a great deal to you, and it means a great deal to our country.

It is my sincere hope that the knowledge you gain and the friendships you have formed here build partnerships that will endure and serve the cause of peace and freedom around the world.

Today, all of you sit in classrooms and learn together. Soon, you will be part of the joint fight as the enlisted leader of Soldiers. The wisdom and the leadership skills you acquire here will help you advise your commander and develop the NCOs and petty officers of tomorrow.

I would like to talk to you about a number of things this morning, and I will begin with our Army's – our Nation's top priority – and

that is our 150,000 Soldiers in harm's way. Those Soldiers are our top priority, and we will never take our eye off that ball.

We have the duty to get those Soldiers what they need when they need it – find the resources, cut through the bureaucracy, and make sure our systems respond to the life-and-death needs of our men and women in harm's way.

Wherever you work in the military, wherever you work in our government that is our highest priority.

And to support our Soldiers, wherever they are, we also must take care of our Army Families – they are full partners in our Soldiers' service to our Nation.

Today's Army looks different than at any other time in our nation's history. Over half of our Soldiers are married, and in Army Families, we have over 700,000 children. We have never had to sustain an All-Volunteer Force so long at war; we never have had to sustain the Families of an All-Volunteer Force so long at war.

All of us – Soldier and Army civilian – must work to ensure that the quality of life for our Army Families is *equal* to the quality of their service.

In our All-Volunteer Force, our Soldiers are volunteers, and so are our Families. They stand shoulder to shoulder with our Soldiers and share in their sacrifice. If our Families are not properly supported, our Soldiers cannot remain ready.

With your leadership, we will ensure that we sustain the national treasure that is the All-Volunteer Force of Soldiers and Army Families. Thank you for what you have done to make the Army Family Covenant a reality for Army Families, and what you will

do to ensure it remains responsive to the dynamic needs of our Families.

Later this morning, I will join General Casey and Sergeant Major Preston to launch the Year of the Noncommissioned Officer. The Noncommissioned Officer Corps is the “backbone of the Army” – but you are more than that – you are its heart and soul.

At the front of every Army mission, in the United States or overseas, you will find a non-commissioned officer.

If you want to know what right looks like, ask an NCO. Or better, watch an NCO. You are the keepers of our standards – a lofty phrase that has substantive meaning on the ground in every place around the world where you find an American Soldier.

Our NCOs lead Soldiers in the Active Army, National Guard and Reserves. You lead the way in education, training, and discipline.

You know the mission and you know our training and equipment. Most importantly, you know our Soldiers – and you know that our first priority is taking care of Soldiers.

Our NCO Corps plays a key role in every component of our Army. From the recruiting station to basic training – to wherever in the world you would find the United States Army – from a recruiting station in Baltimore, to basic training at Ft. Benning to combat in Baghdad – performing combat operations, civil affairs operations, medical and logistical support. And responding to humanitarian crises at home and abroad.

Our NCOs are empowered and trusted like no other NCO in the world – and most advanced Armies in the world today are going to school on our model.

A few years ago, a major writing for the NCO Journal recounted a story from an exercise in Ukraine with a number of foreign military officers:

“A colonel approached and asked to meet with his American counterpart for the weapons familiarization lane. Our instructor was a sergeant first class. After a short silence, we explained that the U.S. contingent had no officers as lane instructors. The colonel’s look of disbelief will linger with me for ... years. Where we primarily had sergeants and staff sergeants, our ... training allies were using captains, majors and lieutenant colonels.”

When Dr. Gates visited Iraq last February, he met the III Corps command sergeant major, CSM Nell Citola. Dr. Gates said of CSM Citola,

“For 14 months he was the Corps’ steel spine, the eyes and ears of its command.” Without his leadership, and the leadership provided by all the other NCOs on the ground, none of the recent progress in Iraq would have been possible. Whenever I travel ... I make a point of meeting with NCOs of all ranks, for there is little doubt that they are the backbone of our military.”

Dr. Gates got it right. To recognize that reality – and re-commit our Army to ensuring that our NCOs remain the world’s gold standard – we have made 2009 the Year of the NCO. Over the year, we will recognize the leadership, professionalism, commitment and courage of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps and initiate and expedite programs to ensure that our NCOs have the training, education and leadership skills necessary to lead our Soldiers into the future.

During this year, we will work to better inform and educate the American public and our Congressional leaders on the roles, responsibilities and opportunities of our NCOs.

And we will honor the sacrifices and celebrate contributions of the NCO Corps, past and present.

SMA Preston will talk in greater detail later today, but let me highlight some of the initiatives for the coming year – initiatives that will impact each of you and your Soldiers.

The first is the Army's initiative to improve access to the knowledge and skills needed to become better leaders and Soldiers. We are expediting the launch of the Army Career Tracker System. It will serve as a "one stop shopping" portal for a Soldier to map out his or her career advancement – including professional and educational tracks.

Moreover, throughout 2009, the Army will continue and enhance our partnership with higher education institutions to ensure that our Soldiers receive the quality educational opportunities they deserve and ensure that our Soldiers receive the appropriate certifications and college credit. This will help guarantee that we are "Providing the Right Education at the Right Time, at the Right Place to the Right Soldier."

And, we want the Congress to better understand the contributions of our NCOs. Currently, less than one quarter of the U.S. Congress has served in the military, so few Members have any first-hand knowledge of our military and those who serve.

This year we will add Noncommissioned officers to our cooperative programs with the Congress – giving NCOs the opportunity to work in Congressional offices and gain a first-hand perspective of the legislative branch – and giving Members of Congress and their staff a better understanding of our NCO Corps and our Army. We are on track to adding NCOs to our three-months Army Congressional Orientation Program. And, we will add Noncommissioned Officers to the House and Senate Liaison

Offices so Members of Congress and key staff will work directly with NCOs.

And we want the American public to better understand the role of our NCOs – and we want young men and women who are making career decisions to understand the opportunity for service and responsibility that a career of service as an NCO in the US Army offers them. To do that, there is no better spokesman than our NCOs – so we are going to create opportunities for you and all of our Noncommissioned Officers to talk directly to the American people – including our youth – through the media and personal appearances. No one can tell the Army story better than you.

Let me switch gears and talk about an initiative we launched last fall – the I AM Strong Campaign – an initiative to address a critical problem facing our Army – the problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault within our ranks. Earlier, I mentioned that as NCOs, you are the “guardians of our standards.” You mold Soldiers with a warrior ethos that is grounded in Army values. The values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage...

And you live Army values – you “always place the mission first, never accept defeat, and never leave a fallen comrade” – “never leave a fallen comrade” – never – and today, your leadership, your training, your mentorship and your conduct are critical as the Army confronts the issue of sexual harassment and sexual assault.

In jarring contrast to the Army values and the warrior ethos that you live out daily and that bind our Soldiers together, since 9/11, 1,800 American Soldiers have been punished for sexually assaulting a fellow Soldier. And experts estimate that only 1 in 5 sexual assaults is reported. If that is accurate ... we have had close to 10,000 sexual assaults – Soldier on Soldier – since 9/11.

The rate of reported sexual assault in our Army is twice the rate of the other services. Today our Army is at war – Soldiers – shoulder to shoulder on the battlefield – but within our ranks, we are taking casualties – American Soldier on American Soldier – Blue on Blue. How can our values based Army tolerate that kind of conduct?

Sixty years ago, we began down the long road to end racial discrimination and root out the remnants of racism from our Army – bring our attitude, words, and deeds in line with Army values. And we succeeded – thanks to great leaders over the past 6 decades – and heart-felt values that were lived out daily.

This year we committed to do the same in regards to gender-based misconduct.

We committed to eradicate sexual harassment and sexual assault from the life of our Army.

And, as we did with equal opportunity, we will become the model for sexual assault prevention in our Nation. Sexual assault is a crime everywhere – but blue on blue, it is that and much more – it is an assault on the core values of every American Soldier.

American Soldiers are bound together by Army values of duty and loyalty that set you apart from the rest of society – by a selfless commitment to each other that outsiders find incomprehensible – a willingness to sacrifice or even die for each other, even die for a stranger if he/she shares your uniform.

In Iraq, that bond led 19-year-old enlisted Soldier and Medal of Honor recipient Ross McGinnis to cover a grenade with his body to save the lives of his fellow Soldiers. He was a regular kid – until he put on the uniform of the United States Army – he lived and died Army values.

In Afghanistan, that bond led 19-year-old medic PFC – now SGT – Monica Brown to throw her body on top of wounded Soldiers to protect them from mortar and small arms fire – and provide them life-saving medical care in the middle of an enemy ambush as shrapnel and bullets rained down around her and the Soldiers she was protecting.

She was awarded a Silver Star for her heroism. Her citation repeats three times: “... disregarding her own safety, PFC Brown shielded the casualties with her own body ...”

PFC McGinnis gave his life and SGT Brown offered hers for their band of brothers and sisters. Monica Brown lives her Army values. She deserves all of her fellow Soldiers to do the same.

It is in this context that we will attack the enemy within our ranks and the crime of sexual assault, and the enabling offense of sexual harassment – and affirm the duty of every Soldier – demand that every Soldier – intervene to protect their comrades from harassment and the risk of assault.

In the Army, there are no by-standers – every Soldier is his or her brother’s and sister’s keeper. That is the Army of Ross McGinnis and Monica Brown.

The brothers and sisters of our Army must be able to count on each other, wherever they are, battlefield or barracks, in a base housing or an apartment, or at an off-post bar, and whenever, on duty or off, no matter the cost.

Soldiers take care of Soldiers – strip away everything else about the Army, that’s what Soldiers do.

We must create a climate with no tolerance for gender-based misconduct – in attitude, word and deed – and become fully, the band of brothers and sisters our values demand.

With your leadership, we will succeed. Army values will lead us to our goal.

You will help us figure out how to get this done and lead the way. I know you will.

And now – I will close – thank you for your service – thank your families for their service.

Last year, we celebrated the 35th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force and the 1.1 million Soldiers, who are on point for freedom here at home and in 80 countries around the world – you and your families – all volunteers, members of the best led, best trained, best equipped Army in the world.

You are part of the less than 1% of our 300 million Americans who have chosen to wear the uniform of the U.S. Army in this time of war.

You are part of that less than 1% who have answered our Nation's call – you are part of a great Army – and you are building a greater Army.

All of America – and the Free World – are in your debt. During WW II, war correspondent Ernie Pyle worked along-side the American GI in battlefields across Europe, Africa and the Pacific until he was killed by enemy fire on the island of Le Shima on April 18, 1945 – and perhaps better than anyone else he told the story of the American Soldier. He once wrote, “In the end, they’re the ones that wars can’t be won without.”

Thank you for your service. Quite simply, in the end, you are the ones we can't win without.

God bless you.